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REPORT ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES THE CASE OF RWANDA

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REPORT ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES THE CASE OF RWANDA

by

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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Rwandese integrated development promotion association (ARDI), was invited by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to prepare a paper on popular participation and access to resources and services. This paper shall be discussed during the International Conference on Popular Participation in Africa's Recovery and Development Process.

We are therefore very happy to make our modest contribution to the reflexions on a complex but rather interesting and captivating subject. It is a pity that the time allotted was very short. In fact, we received specifications on the topic to be treated very late at the beginning of December 1989 and had to submit the paper quickly to Addis Ababa.

However, we hope to furnish the interested reader with some food for thought on the subject to be discussed.

"Putting the people first" takes our minds back to the book. "Il n'est de richesse que d'hommes : investissement humain et qualité de la population" which earned Mr. Theodore W. Schultz, an American economist, the 1979 Nobel Prize for Economics.

Africa's greatest asset is its population. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to find ways and means of effectively utilizing their energy and creativity in favour of economic and social development (see the NGO statement made during the mid-term review of the United Nations Programme of Action for the Economic Recovery and Development of Africa, 1986-1990).

INTRODUCTION

Africa is, today, in the throes of various problems: debt, worsening terms of trade, under-developed socio-economic infrastructures, hunger, natural disasters, conflicts ... indeed, the list is endless.

Unfortunately, the main victims are the poorest of the rural areas and the urban preiphery. In a bid to find solutions to Africa's economic and social reconstruction, many people are increasingly recognizing the role of popular participation in the recovery and development of this continent.

It is in this context, that we propose that the subject of popular participation and access to resources and services – the case of Rwanda should be approached. For the purposes of analysis and convenience the areas for consideration will be outlined in three parts.

(a) The first part is on the current situation of popular participation, and on access to resources and services, and deals mainly with:

(i) The compulsory community work known as " Umuganda";

(ii) The major development projects;

(iii) The actions initiated by the grass-roots communities themselves;

(iv) The actions supported and/or initiated by the NGOs;

(v) The actions supported and/or initiated by the State; and

(vi) The current major economic and social development imbalances.

(b) The second part centres on possible solutions that would lead to popular participation in the recovery process through access to resources and services generated by or linked to development actions;

(c) The last part comprises is a synthesis of problems observed and an attempt to address the issue of what should be done.

I. CURRENT SITUATION OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SERVICES

(a) Preliminary considerations

Here, we will be dealing mainly with the case of Rwanda which we ought to know best. We will also be using "popular participation" rather than "rural participation". In fact, the population of Rwanda is mainly made up of rural and agricultural people and therefore farmers accounting for about 95 per cent of the total population estimated at about 7 million inhabitants with an annual mean growth rate of 3.7 per cent.

The major notable trends are the growth rate of the population which will be doubling in 20 years and the consequent pressure on cultivable land. The current mean population density is about 250 inhabitants per sq. km. In certain areas of the country, the North-east for example, it actually reaches 800 inhabitants per sq. km. It should be noted that the country has a total area of 26,339 sq. km. Also noteworthy is the fact that more than 60 per cent of the population are young people.

Subsistence agriculture is predominant (bananas, beans, sorghum, green peas, maize, sweet potatoes and spuds). Subsistence farming takes most of the available cultivable land area (about 80 per cent). A look at the production structure shows a predominantly agricultural and subsistence pattern, with a highly developed mixed production. Each household produces almost all the food-stuffs it needs on an average farm of less than one hectare. Under the present conditions, it is evident that man's activity on land is reaching the limit (current annual rate of population increases at 4 per cent whereas farming is not intensive).

On the whole, production is on the decline when compared with the rate of population growth. This is borne out by government's recent call for international food aid following scarcity which has affected a sizeable part of the country. Major obstacles generally said to hinder Rwanda's development are:

(a) Scarcity of land, making it difficult to diversify production;

(b) Distance from the nearest Indian Ocean ports which are located more than 1,700 km away;

(c) Lack of natural resources, such as mineral deposits and petroleum;

(d) The high population density (250 inhabitants/sq km) with a high growth rate of about 4 per cent, resulting in an increasing scarcity of cultivable land;

(e) Lack of skilled manpower;

(f) A very narrow export base centred mainly on coffee which accounts for 80 per cent of export earnings, thus exposing the country to external factors which are difficult to escape.

Given the foregoing considerations, it is easy to understand the economic and demographic weight of the rural world on the national life of Rwanda. Thus:

(a) More than 90 per cent of the country's working population is engaged in the agricultural sector;

(b) This sector contributes about 40 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP);

(c) This same sector accounts for more than 80 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings.

About five years ago, a Rwandese economist drew attention to a paradox cited below which we consider still relevant today:

> "the farmer, with all his problems which will be examined further below, produces the bulk of the country's wealth ... but the paradoxically, in trying to ascertain what percentage of such wealth comes back to the producing population, it emerges that 90 per cent of the population receives 40 per cent of the country's wealth while 10 per cent of the population enjoy the remaining

60 per cent. This is just an inkling of the flagrant growth imbalance: there are still many others".[1]

The above shows the degree of rural participation or better still the form in development actions and benefits. Obeviously, rural participation should take place prior to and after any development activity, not forgetting the other aspects of the development process.

(a) The case of the umuganda community work

In 1974, some 15 years ago, the Rwandese authorities instituted a system of national community development work known as **umuganda** in the national language. Participation in such work was compulsory for all active and healthy members of the community. Once a week, civil servants, private sector workers, farmers, men, women and young people participate in this manual work, under the control of the administrative authorities.

This programme involves the execution of many different infrastructural projects such as schools, health centres, public buildings, rural roads, erosion control trenches, afforestation and coffee planting. As participation is compulsory, the best results are not generally obtained. In other words, participation is not maximized, for people participate mainly for fear of punishment. Moreover, considering the days devoted to this work each month throughout the country and the results obtained, it is clear that the loss of earnings is substantial.

It is, however, unnecessary to try to support the argument with figures when talking about the functioning of or results obtained from public services which are generally minimal. The idea that prevailed during the institution of this programme was laudable but, in the long term, seeing that it was an initiative coming from the top to the bottom, such a system does not always meet the priority needs of the people of a given region, especially as, in the case of **umuganda**, it is not the people who decide on the activities to be undertaken within the **umuganda** programme.

(b) The case of large-scale development projects

Many foreign small-and large-scale projects are going on in the country in the areas of agriculture, animal production, forestry and infrastructures such as roads, electricity and water. The large-scale projects are generally financed by organizations such as the World Bank, IFAD, ADB, EDF and FAD. Often, these projects are planned by governments and are prepared with the assistance of foreign experts sent by financing organizations. In no time, such experts assert the suitability of their proposals in countries totally unknown to them.

"During the drawing-up of each project, allowance is made for the consultation of local people but these exercise is not seriously conducted. What the people think cannot be known merely by holding a brief meeting with the local authorities. If anything, popular opinion can only be elicited and expressed painstakingly over a long period of time. This, however, contradicts the project organization approach which requires an initial elaborate document containing specific and quantifiable

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[1] Mugesere Antoine, "Le défi du développement rural" Dialogue No.103, March-April 1984, p.4-26.

objectives". [2] It is, therefore, easy to understand why popular participation in this type of project is out of the question.

Even when there is popular participation in certain aspects of the project, the local people are not fully integrated and do not show enthusiasm.

Many large-scale projects tend to cause confusion in rural areas; these are projects not based on knowledge of the environment and of the priority needs of the people. For example, although presently in Rwanda the commune, the autonomous administrative authority nearest to the people, is considered as the basic development unit, the project promoters in the area do not consult this body sufficiently. Finally, who are the beneficiaries of such projects? The major beneficiaries are:

(a) The financing organizations who, apart from investing their funds there, sometimes also have a hold on the economy of the receiving country;

(b) The foreign experts who enjoy such excessive benefits, as high wages and other financial advantages;

(c) The national executives who enjoy certain fringe benefits such as accommodation and transport allowance.

It is evident that the farmer is the big loser in such a situation, for by means of his farming, he contributes more to earning the foreign exchange which is used to pay for the projects in question and that constitutes the limit of his involvement. He is completely forgotten where he ought to be more fully and efficiently involved.

(c) The case of activities initiated by the grass-roots communities

There are a number of activities initiated by the grass-roots communities in the form of mutual aid and traditional solidarity. This involves groups sharing services or goods in turn, such as the construction of houses, transportation of sick people, communal farm work and savings and credit associations.

Generally, these activities are a big success and the people fully participate in them. An example of this is the tontines [3] practised in the Kivuye commune, in the North of Rwanda, where it is known as **Ibimina** in the national language. It is a farmers' thrift and loan association which operates under the principle of rotation. An amount of money is allocated to beneficiaries in turns. The turn of each member is usually determined by the degree of confidence the group has in him, his assiduousness as a member and the urgency of his expressed needs.

Ibimina meetings are monthly and are held in the home of the person receiving. Each beneficiary's turn is determined by consensus of the committee and its members. Each member must then participate fully and responsibly in the meetings. **Ibimina** is registered in the commune after the payment of a fee. Through such registration, these farmers' associations secure the recognition of the communal authorities.

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[2] Codding, Jien Pierre, "Grands projets et développement communal" Dialogue, No.134, mai-juin 1982, pp.3-15.

[3] Musabimana J.M. Vianney, Les inter-relations entre banques populaire et tontines, cas de la commune Kivuye-Ryumba. CF.R.C. - IWACU, Kigali, février 1986, pp.8-9.

It should be noted that **Ibimina** fulfills the farmers' expectations. In fact, several projects have been financed through it, such as house improvement and livestock and farm purchase.

In spite of certain difficulties and setbacks, these tontines are actively practised by the farmers. They play both an economic and social role.

There is no doubt that these farmers' thrift and loan associations, in which member participate fully, contribute optimally, within the limits of their ability, to the socio-economic development of their society.

The "Peoples' Banks" in Rwanda draw sufficiently on these local structures to establish themselves in the areas. It should be noted that the "Peoples' Banks" constitute the most rapidly-expanding financial institution in the rural areas. Its main objective is to mobilize savings in the rural areas and to grant loans to the rural agricultural and cottage industry sector. A "People's Bank" is a kind of thrift and loan co-operative. Presently, there are a little more than 100 such banks in the whole country.

It is worth mentioning that these banks were not started by the people although they were immensely inspired by them and operate, as much as possible, through participation.

(d) The case of actions supported and/or initiated by public authorities

According to a survey conducted recently by INADES - Formation Rwanda (a non-profit-making concern) and contained in a document entitled: INVENTAIRE DES ONG 1989, 143 NGOs are operating in the country. However, this inventory was not exhaustive, as it did not include co-operatives and parent associations that have established private schools. In the survey, NGOs were considered as structures providing any assistance or contribution to development in its widest sense, independently of what the government provides: national or foreign non-profit-making associations, religious bodies, foreign voluntary organizations duly recognized by agreement with the government. [4] The areas of operation of NGOs are very vast, but the most preferred areas are: health, cottage industry promotion, rural centres mainly for agricultural activities, adult education, teaching at all levels, social rehabilitation of handicapped people and orphans and the promotion of co-operatives and productive associations. The NGOs of Rwanda are concerned with four types of target population: young people, farmers, women and children.

It is necessary to look at certain grouping patterns and the horizontal dialogue of NGOs based on their areas of activity. There is, for example, the CCOAIB (the consultative council co-ordination of aid organizations supporting grass-roots initiatives). The members of this organization specifically direct their activities towards grass-roots people especially in the rural areas. Generally, the participation of the target population is the focal point of OAIB approach.

The Rwandese integrated development promotion association (ARDI), for example, especially encourage the full participation of the population requesting assistance. The intended result being the taking over and management, by the people, of the development actions undertaken. Generally, when the grass-roots population takes the initiative to carry out an action that will respond to a felt need and which

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[4] INADES -FORMATION RWANDA asbl et Banque Mondiale; Inventaire des ONG 1989, Kigali, 1989, p.134.

requires external support, in this circumstance support from an NGO, participation is considerable from the beginning to the end provided the assistance secured is relevant th NGO takes the socio-cultural factors of the area into account and honours its commitments.

In this context, examples can be cited of water supply or spring management schemes in which the people have been involved successfully right from the beginning up to the water consumption stage as well as in the maintenance of activities. However, in other cases, the people participated only at the execution stage of activities in conformity with the **Umuganda** work system. Maintenance of the water point is more or less taken care of by a person generally designated by the local authority. This usually happens when the population has not been consulted during the needs identification. Understandably, this practice does not go down well in the socio-cultural environment and is therefore not welcome. On the whole, it can be stated that actions supported and/or initiated by the NGOs tend to secure genuine participation.

(e) The case of actions supported and/or initiated by public authorities

Here, we are concerned mainly with social and health activities such as hospitals, health centres and nutritional centres, as well as training activities at youth training centres, community development and continuous training centres. The State establishes and supports many such social, health and economic infrastructured facilities. It should be noted that popular participation is centred mainly on construction project execution through the **Umuganda** system. But when it comes to identifying needs or planning such projects, popular participation is extremely limited. It is, however, not impossible, even if it can only be indirect and induced. It can be indirect through the representatives of the rural communities; and induced when the dialogue assumes that the rural communities are in a position to use certain rather technical facts.

Also, a close look at the way in which the rural populations benefit from this type of public service shows that the capital and other urban centres are given priority service. It is with vividness and perspicacity that Mugesere A. [5] describes the life in the countryside as "the difference in income levels between the city and the country-side, the mediocrity of rural life, the limited hope aroused by the traditional conditions of living, are the causes of the rural exodus".

It should, therefore, be noted that popular participation in activities supported and/or initiated by public authorities is limited. It is mainly involved in the execution of manual work; but in terms of planning, management and profit sharing, popular participation continues to be low and unbalanced.

(f) Current major imbalances in economic and social development

(a) Food

Apart from the current food shortage in the country, the people of Rwanda, in general, and the country folk, in particular, do not feed properly. The Second Five-Year Economic, Social and Cultural Development Plan, 1977-1981 estimated that qualitative undernourishment is almost general in the rural areas, and that poverty-linked illnesses are responsible for 75 per cent of deaths (Mugesera A., p.59).

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[5] Mugasere A., op.cit, p.14.

The third plan (1982-1986) estimated that 20 per cent of the population is permanently suffering from under-nourishment and malnutrition (Musegere P. 44). The frequently cited causes are:

(a) Scarcity and impoverishment of the soil;

(b) Climatic problems;

(c) Archaic farming practices;

(d) Under-nourishment of livestock, drop in dairy products and meat;

(e) Plant diseases;

(f) Fall in family income;

(g) Insufficiency of strategic stock;

(h) Eating habits that favour quantity at the expense of quality.

Antoine Mugesere in his already cited article adds:

"the countryside is delepleted to feed the city; it supplies the city with meat, agricultural, subsistence and industrial products and always ends up the loser."

Under such conditions, the farmers' priority is survival. Are the country's decision-makers and elites aware of this fact? Can popular participation be imagined outside these major preoccupations?

(b) Financial resources

It should be noted that agricultural activity is the source of revenue for most of the working population.

But then the farmer is poorly remunerated for his products. The difference between the cost of planting and harvest is enormous. He also loses in terms of weights and measures as well as in terms of increase in the price of imported products. He sells much more of his agricultural products in order to acquire other goods he needs. Besides, he has several financial obligations to face with his meagre financial resources; these are taxes, health expenses, school fees, various payments and family expenditures.

It should be noted that the granting of rural loan, especially agricultural loan is still insignificant, as the banks prefer to finance trade, construction, transport and industry. Thus, it can be stated that access to resources, especially financial is still difficult for the rural people who constitute more than 90 per cent of the country's population.

To be convinced of this, let us take a good example illustrating the case of coffee, extracted from Entraide et fraternité, Flash No.83-143 of 1 March 1983, whose ever convincing words are as follows: "... in 1981, the 500,000 producers of coffee only received 2.4 million francs or, on the average, 4.800 FRW each person, whereas the total amount of sale to the consumer was 11.2 million FRW. The share of the producing farmers amounted to 21.42 per cent of revenue from coffee. The remainder, 78.58 per cent or the equivalent of 8.8 million are shared among the numerous middlemen in the country."

The producer's price of coffee has remained practically the same since 1977 till date (120 to 125 FRW/kg) whereas inflation, resulting in a reduction in the purchasing power of the Rwandese franc, reached an average annual rate of 6.2 per cent, [6] from 1977 to 1986. It exceeded 10 per cent during certain years. The farmer's income is merely symbolic.

(c) Health care, training and information

Rwanda has made great strides in this area, although there is still a very long way to go. In the area of health, there are currently about 30 hospitals and approximately 150 health centres for a population of seven million people. Generally, these infrastructures, especially the hospitals, are much nearer the towns and urban centres in a proportion of 50 per cent, and so are secondary schools.

The imbalance in terms of how services are distributed to the rural populations should also be noted. There is a certain bias operating against the latter both in access to secondary and higher education and in medical and information services.

Special emphasis is laid on literacy programmes and access to information. According to the general census carried out in 1978, the literate population from the age of seven upwards was 60.3 per cent, while the literacy evaluation revealed that in 1987, the illiterate population aged seven years and above was about 44 per cent. These figures should, certainly, be taken with reservations, as the literacy level is yet to be agreed upon. At what literacy level can a person be considered knowledgeable enough to be able to learn to improve his standard of living? Nevertheless, it is clear that much remains to be done in this regard, in the rural areas.

The proportion of people who can read, count and calculate is still low compared to that cited above. Yet it is very difficult to combat ignorance and poverty with an illiterate population. It goes without saying that in this context, the circulation of written information is virtually non-existent in the rural areas.

(d) Women

Legally, men and women have equal rights and duties, as citizens. But, the majority of rural women in Rwanda live in near-total dependence on their husbands. In fact, it is the man who truly owns all household factors of production. He takes all the important decisions, especially in the distribution of the meagre family. However, the Rwandese woman, in her double role as wife and mother, has a respectable place in society.

For about 15 years, it has been observed that:

(a) The rural women participated in women or mixed associations that have been associated with development activities, such as agriculture, livestock and cottage industry;

(b) There has been an increase in the number of girls attending schools, particular secondary and higher;

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[6] Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, L'Economie Rwandaise, 25 ans d'efforts (1962-1987), Kigali, June 1987, p.214.

(c) There has been an increase in girls and women's involvement in income-generating activities, such as paid employment and petty trading;

(d) Generally, there has been some awakening in women.

On the whole, however, women's promotion has yet to be actively carried out, especially in the rural areas.

II. POSSIBLE WAYS OF STRENGTHENING POPULAR PARTICIPATION

(a) Preliminary note

In part I of this report, we tried to underline the role of popular participation and the people's access to resources and services; using certain illustrative cases, we were able to point out the major imbalances worthy of note. In the second part, certain solutions will be proposed. Such solutions need to be discussed, corrected and amended. We will be examining the following:

(a) Development-oriented education;

(b) Farmer's organizations and the participatory approach.

(a) Development-oriented education

This means an awareness of the world around us and an effort to transform it. In our opinion, development-oriented education is meant for the following two main categories of people:

(a) Individuals who already have a certain level of education and/or who have all sorts of responsibilities in the nation (politicians, civil servants, intellectuals and academics, school children ...);

(b) The common people (farmers, craftsmen, small wage earners and others).

The first category mainly concerns formal education and extra-curricular training.

The formal training consists mainly of academic courses which must be sound, realistic and suitable. Presently, there are distortions in the teaching programme, affecting them negatively. The various school reforms that have become widespread in our countries have significantly reduced, the quality of academic training as they have not been sufficiently prepared and discussed in national debate. It would therefore be necessary to analyze this sector and to try to give greater importance first to the quality of teachers and then to the programmes and facilities to set up. Should graduates be recruited on the basis of their individual performance, everyone will his own quota. Extra-curricular activities mainly concernthe working population. This has to do with further training, involving public speaking, and debates on themes of national interest. It is felt that this type of education will increase professional and general knowledge and will go a long way to inculcate the spirit of patriotism and democracy.

The second category composed mainly of the rural world needs leadership training. Here, such training should promote awareness, provoke reflexion and empower the people to assume responsibility for their own development.

"Rural leadership training means helping rural folk to identify their problems, to look for the root causes and to make concerted efforts to find solutions to them." [7]

Is this really possible?

The problems are well-known. They are food, health, childrens' schooling, purchasing power, ...

Who should assume the leadership role other than the country's elite? It is certainly necessary for these elites to be aware of this necessity and to participate in supporting the rural people. We believe that popular participation should be a priority in our countries.

(b) Farmers' organizations and the participatory approach

Since the benefits of development will not fall like manna from heaven, the farmers must organize themselves to secure them. [8] It is clear that farmers cannot solve their problems on their own. It is necessary that the farmers should first take cognizance of their situation so as to be able to organize themselves in order to defend their interests.

For the rural world to be developed, the people first have to be organized. When the people form such organized groups as producers', sales and buyers' groups, they are protecting themselves. But such organization of the rural people so that they can participate more fully in decision-making, project execution and self-management, will only become possible when the country's elites, who are assumed to be knowledgeable, are with the people. The participatory approach to serving the people, especially rural people, is to be initiated with the assistance of intellectuals committed to such a noble cause.

III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The thinking on popular participation has revealed a host of problems. We have observed a series of obstacles and inadequacies mainly: decision-makers who do or do not consult the target populations concerned: the projects, big or small which operate without involving the so-called beneficiaries; the few cases in which the people are invited to participate, are those of project execution; paradoxically, whereas it is they who produce the bulk of the wealth, they have always lost in all respects with regard to food, access to financial resources, health services, training and information, not to mention the relegation of women to a secondary role.

Certain positive points have however been noted: when the initiatives are taken by the rural people themselves, they participate fully and achieve much. Everything, including activities supported by the public authorities or NGOs, move smoothly.

As for possible solutions, we have noted that:

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[7] Mugesera A. op.cit., p.19.

[8] Mugesera A., op.cit., p.19.

(a) Development-oriented education should include not only academic and extra-curricular training but also rural leadership training. In other words, it is necessary that our States should make substantive investments, more intellectual than material. It will also be necessary for intellectuals to associate with the people in order to help them develop themselves;

(b) Farmers organizations cannot be initiated without the support of the committed elites.